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Book Report

Where Good Ideas Come From: The Natural History of Innovation

“Where Good Ideas Come From” by Steven Johnson is a book that simply states how good ideas are created. However, it does not simply spell out the people that have come up with all these great creations but rather describes mostly the best scenario and atmosphere for a great idea to emerge.

In the first section of the book called the Adjacent Possible, Johnson speaks of how the world is always ready for immense change but only certain changes can actually happen. This points to how even though many ideas are out there; some are not physically possible yet. The idea must be in the adjacent possible to even be able to be created. Johnson as well talks about how each of us is in our own adjacent possibility. He continues to describe how we are surrounded by potential new configurations, new ways of breaking out of our standard routines. The trick is to figure out ways to explore the edges of possibility that surround us.

Next section called Liquid Network breaks down exactly what an idea is. Which essentially is a network of its own in the most elemental form. When an idea pops in your head it is the neurons that form a network and try to form the connections to make that idea be able to take form. As well, just as humans did, it takes a while for ideas to develop from their primal state. Human beings started in settlements that resembled liquid networks. Then with the increase in population came a crucial increase in the number of possible connections that could be formed within the group.

Slow Hunch, the next chapter, speaks of how ideas take time to develop. It’s not on a sudden stroke of genius or moment of great insight that leads to a game changing idea. It takes years to develop ideas that break through the Adjacent Possible. As well, most slow hunches never last long enough to turn into something useful, because they pass in and out of our memory too quickly. We have an interesting idea that could be cultivated but then become too distracted by more pressing matters and the hunch disappears. Which leads to important statement that Johnson wrote which is: write everything down!

Johnson continues into his next chapter talking about serendipity, or as explained in his novel the fortunate mistake of making discoveries while searching for an item completely unrelated. He then goes onto explain how search engines like Google and websites like Wikipedia expand this possibility greatly. This continues into the next chapter that speaks on Error. Johnson relays that error is good. The reason why is because it allows us to expand our thoughts, and think of ideas that will succeed.

After the above sections speak about how ideas are created this section called, “Exaptation” is what gives us that motivation to make the idea we come up with is possible. Allowing us to explore other options in order to retrieve the same result as originally intended. It is the creative flare that allows us to change some simple idea into an extravagant product.

Next in the chapter titled Platforms it speaks on how innovation and brilliant ideas are likely to be created when ideas of different people in different fields are being challenged and critiqued by others. The reason why is because this allows for new combinations and new ideas to be formed.

My book was extensive in detail and had countless examples included in the book itself explaining these topics above. I would say the Steve Johnsons did a great job on truly describing in a explaining the journey that an idea takes from beginning as a simple signal in the brain to a technology or service that could potentially change the world. This book describes explicitly how innovation happens and the keys to its success. Not only was I intrigued by the way Johnson he explained his steps of innovation but the examples he used to clarify each concept truly added to the book.